

COMMUNITY LIVABILITY ELEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Mountlake Terrace is a community of neighborhoods, with key features that include a town center, terrace geography, views, parks, and Lake Ballinger. Straddling the I-5 freeway, it is part of metropolitan Seattle and the Puget Sound region.



People in Mountlake Terrace represent a wide variety of lifestyles, ages, and income levels. Some have lived here all their lives; others are new to the city. Some are native English-speakers; others are learning as they go along. Some are on fixed incomes; others live affluently. The most recent Census tells us, for example, that 21% of the population is less than 15 years old, while 16% is 55 or older. By race, about 78% is white and nearly 13% is Asian. Family incomes vary, with 3.3% bringing in less than \$10,000 annually and 9.4% bringing in more than \$100,000.



BACKGROUND

The City was officially established in 1954. It has a Council-Manager form of government. Civic buildings include City Hall, police and fire stations, library, recreation pavilion, public works facility, and seven public schools. The schools are operated by Edmonds School District.

Key Facts

A list of key facts about Mountlake Terrace is shown in Table CL-1.

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Table CL-1

Estimated Population in 2002: ¹	20,470
Census Population ²	20,362
Bachelors degree or higher ³	24.4%
Approximate city size	4 square miles
Overall density ⁴	5,090 persons per square mile
Number of housing units ⁵	8,217
Residential density ⁶	5.3 housing units per acre
Estimated number of jobs ⁷	6,644
Jobs/ housing balance ⁸	0.80
Median household income ⁹	\$47,238
Distance to downtown Seattle ¹⁰	10 miles
Distance to downtown Everett ¹¹	16 miles
Year of city’s incorporation	1954

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of a community provide key information regarding city residents and what City services may be required.

Gender

The City’s 2000 population of 20,362 was almost evenly split – 49.5% male, and 50.5% female.

Age

The median age of City residents is 33.5 years; this is slightly younger than the median age for the County as a whole (34.7 years). Although the County’s median age has risen since 1990 (to 34.7 years from 32.1 years), due to growth of the “baby boom” age group and the elderly

¹ According to the Washington State Office of Financial Management

² In 2000, according to U.S. Census data

³ Percentage of adults with bachelors degree or higher, based on U.S. Census 2000 data

⁴ Average number of people per square mile, counting all areas of city, (i.e., a measure of “gross density,” based on all land area, including streets, etc.)

⁵ Note: a “housing unit” refers to a residence, e.g., a detached house, a townhome, or apartment

⁶ Average number of housing units per acre of residentially-zoned land (i.e., a measure of “gross density” based on all residentially-zoned land area, including streets, etc.)

⁷ Estimated number of “covered” jobs (i.e., jobs covered by unemployment insurance) within city boundaries in the year 2000, according to 2002 data from the Puget Sound Regional Council

⁸ Total number of jobs compared to total number of housing units. (Note: A jobs/ housing rate of 1.0 would mean that, theoretically, one person in each household could have a job within the city.)

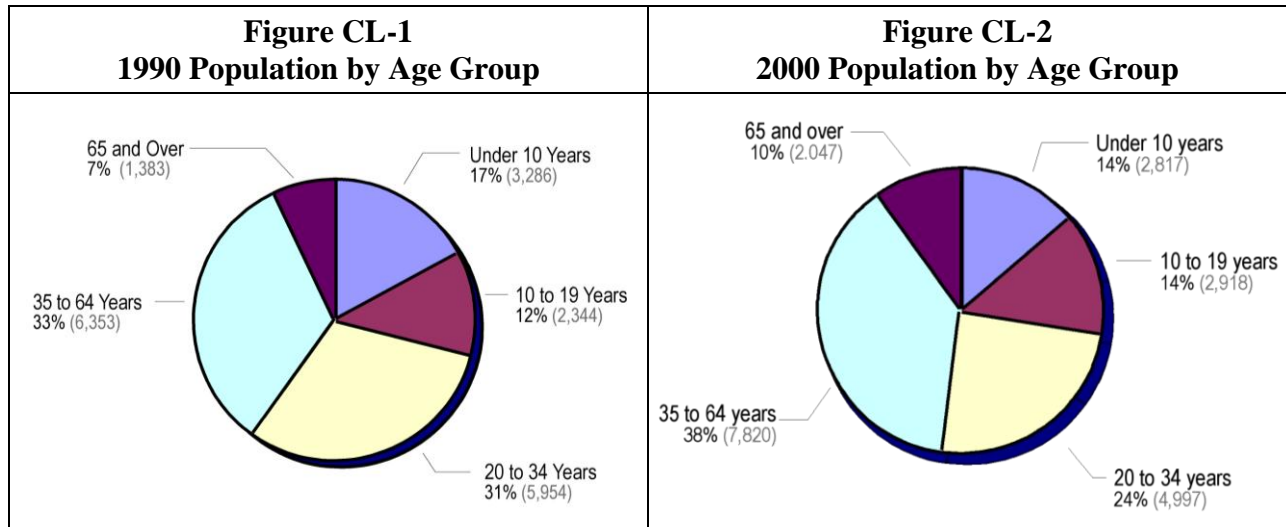
⁹ Annual amount, based on U.S. Census for 2000

¹⁰ Approximate

¹¹ Approximate

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population, the City’s median age has remained the same. The City’s elderly population is increasing, however. Figures CL-1 and CL-2 show that in 2000, 10% of the City’s population was at least 65 years old, compared to 7% in 1990. The “under ten years” portion has decreased from 1,790 in 1990 to 1,490 in 2000.

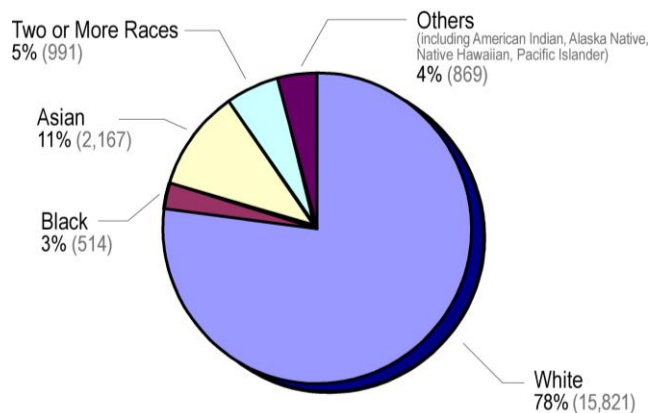


Source: U.S. Census 2000

Race, Place of Birth, and Language

The City of Mountlake Terrace is predominately white, with Asians constituting the second largest racial group. This is similar to the County as a whole. The City is slightly more racially diverse than in 1990. 5.7% of City residents are Hispanic/Latino (of any race).

Figure CL-3
2000 Population by Race



Source: U.S. Census 2000

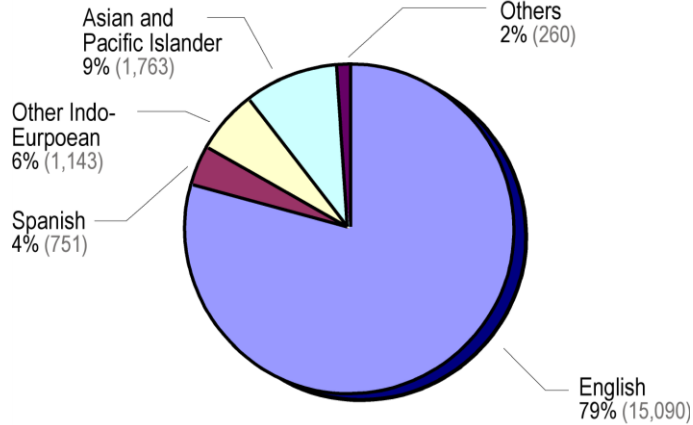
81% of City residents were born in the United States. Of the 3,436 foreign-born residents, 48% are naturalized citizens.

English is the only language spoken at home by 79.4% of the population: Of other languages

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spoken at home, Asian and Pacific Island languages are the most common. Approximately 39% of those who speak other languages at home speak English “less than very well”.

Figure CL-4
Language Spoken at Home – 2000 Population Over 5 Years of Age

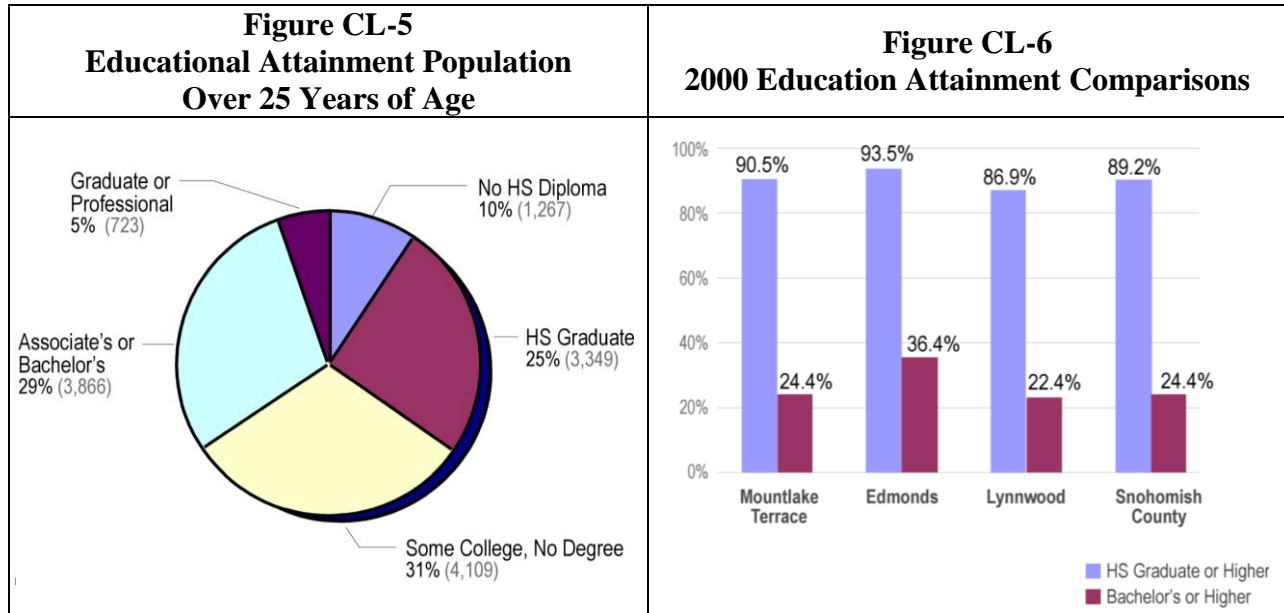


Source: U.S. Census 2000

Education

According to the 2000 census, the percentage of City residents with at least a high school diploma is 90.5%, similar to the County as a whole. 24.4% of City residents have a Bachelor’s Degree or higher, again consistent with the County as a whole. Education levels are rising. In 1990, 86.6% of City residents had at least a high school diploma, and 19.3% had a Bachelor’s Degree or higher.

The educational attainment of City residents is shown below:



Source: U.S. Census 2000

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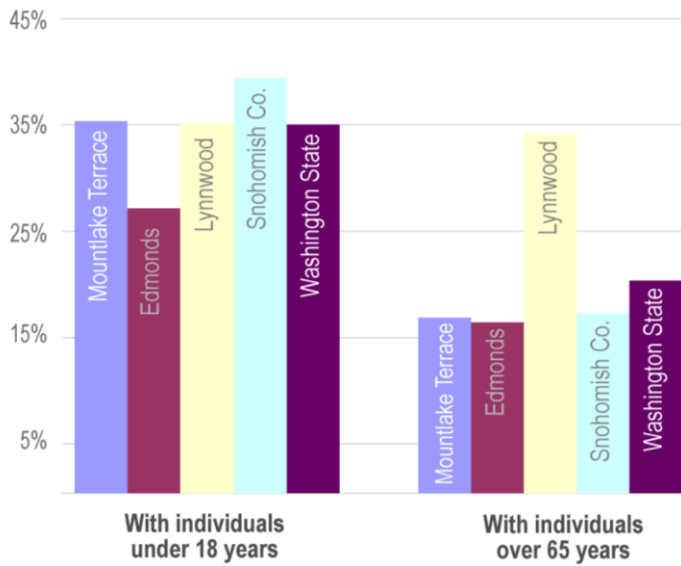
Households

In 2000, the City of Mountlake Terrace had 7,962 total households, 36% of which were families with children under 18 years of age, and 16.8% of which had individuals 65 years and over.

As shown in Figure CL-7, the percentage of households that include youths (i.e. individuals under age 18) is the same for Mountlake Terrace as for neighboring Lynnwood and for the State as a whole. Mountlake Terrace has a higher proportion of households with youths than Edmonds, its western neighbor. Comparisons for households with seniors tell a different story. Mountlake Terrace is similar to Edmonds and Snohomish County as a whole, but with a significantly smaller percentage of senior households than Lynnwood.

The average household size in 2000 was 2.54; this is a decline from 2.60 in 1990. For Snohomish County as a whole, the average household size was 2.65 for 2000 and 2.68 for 1990. Smaller household size is a nation-wide trend.

**Figure CL-7
City Comparisons: Households with Youth and Seniors**



Source: U.S. Census 2000

Historic Character

For thousands of years, the Mountlake Terrace site was part of Indian territory, a place where wildlife inhabited the forests and wetlands and where fish swam freely in the lake and streams. About 150 years ago, non-native settlers moved in. Some of the area was logged and became farmlands. Despite these changes, a rural atmosphere prevailed. After World War II, developers built clusters of small cinder-block houses for the G.I.s, their families, and others in the growing Northwest region. Shopping and other services formed the nucleus of a downtown. Public buildings and parks were added too. Within a few years time, the Mountlake Terrace site had become urban in character. Changes did not stop, of course. As shopping malls outside the city

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became popular, the small downtown went through a cycle of losing retail stores. New auto-oriented businesses, along with residential neighborhoods, filled in the city's edges.

Current Character

In some ways, Mountlake Terrace is similar in character to other suburban cities. However, it has special features and characteristics that, taken together, make this community unique. Some of these are listed below.

- Diversity of people
- Comfortable library
- Community-oriented recreation
- Community events
- Parks and open space
- Trees
- High point (Melody Hill area)
- Terrace geography
- I-5 corridor through center of town
- Quiet lake on edge of town
- Town center with commercial district and civic center
- Variety of building types (except few pre-dating 1950)
- Network of streets and sidewalks
- Natural environment (e.g., streams and habitat areas)
- Interurban Trail
- Neighborhoods
- Diversity of housing
- Cinder block cottages as city's historic core
- Proximity to Seattle and Everett
- Part of larger urban area
- Several high-traffic streets
- Easy access to transit
- Views of mountains, lake, and open space.

Future Character

We know about present-day Mountlake Terrace, but when it comes to the future, we can only speculate, based on available information. Features and characteristics that seem likely to be part of the city's future include the following:

- All items in the "current character" list
- More development in town center
- Citizen-friendly civic center
- Enhanced recreation facilities
- Pleasant, convenient walking opportunities.

Community Values

In any modern-day community, different people have different ideas about values, i.e., what they think is important, for themselves or their family. The concept of *community* values goes beyond this; it refers to what is important for the community as a whole. In Mountlake Terrace, while a scientific poll has not been taken, observations suggest that most residents in Mountlake Terrace would agree on the importance of certain values at the broad community level, related to city planning.

These community-level values include **safety**, or the knowledge that the community is relatively safe from crime, accidents, natural hazards, and other threats. They include **walkability**, the ability for people to easily walk to places, such as the school, park, library, maybe the swimming

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pool or a restaurant. Recreational walking, jogging, and bicycling are associated with this value too. Another value seems to be a “**sense of community**,” the idea that people who live or work in the same general locale feel some connection with each other, are committed to maintaining or improving the community, and recognize their shared future. A sense of community typically grows from citizens seeing and talking with each other, solving common problems, and enjoying their common resources, public spaces, and neighborly activities.

Community values, related to city planning, include other qualities too. For example, Mountlake Terrace citizens generally value the area’s **natural environment**, including the lake, open space, wetlands, and trees. They also seem to place a high value on **neighborhood character**, especially whether their neighborhood is reasonably maintained, quiet, and comfortable. **Recreation** is highly valued too, as indicated by the community’s support for public parks and recreation programs. Support for schools and a library system attest to **education** being a community value. In general, the community seems to be interested in having **attractive buildings and landscaping**, whether they are existing or new. Most people feel strongly about basic issues, such as a healthy **economy**, efficient **transportation**, and desirable **housing**.

In the years ahead, this Comprehensive Plan will guide development decisions so they reflect community values and other needs.

Sustainability Strategy

Many of the community values identified in this chapter have long-term implications related to environment, economy, and community livability. These three groupings of long-term values or qualities can be included under a single term: sustainability. The idea is that for a community to be “sustainable”—healthy and viable for a long time into the future—it should have a good natural environment, be part of a productive economy, and provide quality of life for all. In recognition of the public’s interest in a good environment, economy, and livability—and the fact that these characteristics are interrelated—a Sustainability Strategy was adopted in 2008. The Sustainability Strategy identifies ways that Mountlake Terrace can achieve its Community Vision. (See “Community Vision” elsewhere in this chapter.)

Community Organizations

Various organizations play a vital role in community life. They provide ways for people to get acquainted, help each other, and accomplish something for the greater good. In Mountlake Terrace, some have formal partnership arrangements with City government; others are unaffiliated. Examples of long-term community organizations include:

- Seniors Group
- Friends of the Arts
- Garden Club
- Historical Committee.

Community Vision

Current conditions are important, but so is planning ahead. A “community vision” describes the expectation or hope for what a community will be in future years. Usually, this is written as a

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short statement that can capture one’s imagination, yet be grounded in reality. It is stated in present tense to describe the future. When people believe in a community vision and use it, they will shape what happens. Following is the twenty-year vision:

- Mountlake Terrace is an attractive, walkable city with a revitalized town center, pleasant neighborhoods, healthy environment, and ample opportunities for housing, education, businesses, recreation, and community involvement.

ENVISIONING NEIGHBORHOODS

Communities are made up of neighborhoods. Planning for neighborhoods is an important part of planning for the whole community. Mountlake Terrace has six large neighborhoods (or districts) that are identifiable, based on geography, development patterns, and transportation circulation. The six districts are: the Town Center Neighborhood, the Gateway Neighborhood, the Melody Hill Neighborhood, the Cascade View Neighborhood, the Cedar Terrace Neighborhood, and the Lake Ballinger Neighborhood. They are shown on a map, Figure CL-8, for conceptual purposes.

Each of these large neighborhoods has a primary focus area, comprised of a commercial cluster (or, in one case, the lake). Each has a recreational component. Each has a network of streets connecting the neighborhood together. At the same time, boundaries are not entirely distinct; homes and businesses on the edge of one neighborhood share characteristics and concerns of the adjoining neighborhood. Within each of the large neighborhoods, many smaller neighborhoods exist.

Like whole cities, neighborhoods evolve over time, some things staying the same and some things changing. How will Mountlake Terrace neighborhoods change over the next twenty or thirty years? How will they look and what kinds of places will be there? What will stay the same and what will be different? Will walking and bicycling be easy? Will the neighborhoods be friendly to families, large and small? Will they have parks and trees? Will people be close to shopping and schools? Will there be affordable housing? Will neighbors be able to meet each other and feel a sense of safety and pride in where they live or work?

While no one can fully predict the future, understanding trends and having a vision is helpful in preparing for choices ahead. Below are broad-level descriptions of what is anticipated for the six large neighborhoods of Mountlake Terrace during the next twenty years.

Town Center Neighborhood

Location: The Town Center Neighborhood includes and surrounds a central business district. The area is marked, roughly, by the I-5 freeway on the west, 220th on the north, 48th Avenue on the east, and 236th Street on the south (see the map, Figure CL-8.) Here is how this district could be in fifteen or twenty years.

Imagine the Future: At the heart of this neighborhood--and the community--is the town center (or “downtown,”) a central, pedestrian-oriented business district. “Town Center” is a thriving and vibrant area, where many businesses and combined business/residential buildings are located. New development is compact and walker-friendly, similar to a traditional downtown. Businesses include restaurants, coffee shops, and local services, as well as retail and offices. Parking is

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adequate but not visually dominant from the street. People can easily hop on transit to connect to other destinations. Attractive landscaping brings in greenery and helps absorb rainfall.

56th Avenue is the “Main Street” through the Town Center. It is lined with wide sidewalks and trees, leading to a mix of businesses, residences, and other uses. Banners and decorations announce holidays and community events.

Around the Town Center itself, a variety of homes (attached and detached) are located. They have small to medium-sized yards for open space and plants. In this neighborhood, a lot of residents know each other and participate in community events; they like being in the center of the city.

On the west side of the neighborhood, Veterans Park, the library, and public plazas encourage community-gathering. City Hall, a police station, and a fire station also provide for civic needs. City Hall serves as an attractive focal point that complements the downtown area. It features comfortable space for the public, including community meeting rooms, information displays, and a visitor center. A trail through Veterans Park connects the civic buildings to the 236th Street park-and-ride lot.

On the east side, public gathering spaces include the Recreation Pavilion, an elementary school, and Terrace Creek Park, with its tree-sheltered trail. At the Recreation Pavilion, people of all ages enjoy the indoor swimming pool and other sports facilities.

Gateway Neighborhood

Location: Gateway Neighborhood comprises the southern portion of the City and includes a commercial area called the Gateway Plaza. It is contained, roughly, by the I-5 freeway on the west, 236th Street on the north, Mountlake Terrace city limits on the east, and 244th (the King-Snohomish county line) on the south. Other cities, namely Shoreline, Lake Forest Park, and Brier, touch this neighborhood too (see the map, Figure CL-8). Here is how it could be in fifteen or twenty years.

Imagine the Future: Gateway Plaza is a regional, transit-oriented commercial complex where hundreds of people work. A mini-transit center allows people to conveniently come and go to other destinations. There are facilities that provide entertainment opportunities. Garage space beneath one of the buildings provides vehicle parking too. A small creek passes through the Plaza site and is treasured by the neighborhood.

On the south side, a stretch of busy 244th Street is lined by businesses and multifamily residential buildings. It is intersected by another commercially-oriented street, 56th Avenue, which leads people to the town center. Above some of the commercial spaces on this avenue, condominiums sit quietly, their balconies facing out.

Detached houses, including a few with accessory units (“in-law apartments”), and townhomes comprise most of the housing in the Gateway neighborhood. Small and medium-sized yards provide open space and plantings for residents.

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Public green space and wildlife habitat is located on the shoreline of Lyons Creek, east and west branches, and within a utility corridor that doubles as a biking and walking route.

Melody Hill Neighborhood

Location: Melody Hill Neighborhood makes up the northwest corner of the city, including the old Melody Hill school site. It extends, roughly, to Highway 99 on the west, 212th on the north (bordering the City of Lynnwood), I-5 on the east, and 224th on the south (see the map, Figure CL-8). Here is how it could be in fifteen or twenty years.

Imagine the Future: An accessible core commercial area, with its mix of retail, offices, and entertainment facilities, runs along both sides of 220th Street. A well-designed office and retail complex, featuring mountain and lake views, sits on the old Melody Hill school site. One part has been retained for a public plaza, with lush landscaping and a spectacular water fountain.

Light industry, public services, and offices occupy much of the land to the north and west. Thousands of people work in the vicinity.

Townhomes and multifamily residential comprise a significant portion of housing, though some neighborhood areas have only detached houses. Trees and plants bring greenery to the cityscape.

The neighborhood connects easily with the rest of the region via I-5 and local arterials. Many people use the transit system to travel from one destination to another.

Every day, people walk, jog, and bike along a community favorite, the Interurban Trail. Another special place is Halls Creek, which has been protected for fish habitat. People enjoy seeing the creek from various viewing sites.

Cascade View Neighborhood

Location: Cascade View Neighborhood stretches from the I-5 freeway on the west, to the city limits on the east, to 220th Street on the south, and to 212th on the north. One corner extends even further north and may include land beyond the city's 2002 boundaries (see the map, Figure CL-8). Here is how it could be in fifteen or twenty years.

Imagine the Future: Shopping is convenient at a large multifaceted complex in the northeast area. Several other thriving businesses are located in the neighborhood. New development is clustered together, with open space surrounding sensitive wetlands.

An award-winning high school draws students from around the area. Residents appreciate the variety of homes, attached and detached, with their landscaping and yards. Many attractive new residences have been added. The whole neighborhood is in a state of revitalization.

Terrace Creek Trail links people to green space and recreation. A bicycle route is popular too.

Cedar Terrace Neighborhood

Location: Cedar Terrace Neighborhood is contained, roughly, by 220th Street on the north, 48th

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Avenue on the west, 240th on the south, and the city limits on the east, blending with the adjacent City of Brier (see the map, Figure CL-8). Here is how it could be in fifteen or twenty years.

Imagine the Future: Centrally located businesses, within and near Cedar Plaza, provide convenient shopping, dining, and local services. Neighbors enjoy meeting here.

Residential needs are met by detached houses, with some accessory units (“in-law apartments”), townhomes, and well-kept multifamily complexes. Many people living here simply walk to Cedar Plaza for regular shopping and socializing.

Schools are the pride of the neighborhood. They provide a place for educating young people, as well as for community-gathering. Parks, bike routes, and pedestrian amenities add livability too.

The east branch of Lyons Creek has been restored as a natural habitat for fish and wildlife.

Lake Ballinger Neighborhood

Location: Lake Ballinger Neighborhood surrounds Lake Ballinger. It is marked, roughly, on the west by the lake, on the north by 224th Street, on the east by the I-5 freeway, and on the south by the city limits (see the map, Figure CL-8). Here is how it could be in fifteen or twenty years.

Imagine the Future: The lake is the key feature here. It offers scenic views, fish habitat, and public recreation. A trail encourages pedestrian activity. Lake Ballinger’s views and recreational amenities are enjoyed by many people.

The neighborhood is comprised mostly of residential uses (attached and detached), along with a variety of recreational facilities and open space. A few offices are interspersed. In almost every setting, landscaping and trees predominate. Habitat and greenbelt areas are also provided by Halls Creek and its shoreline.

From the neighborhood, access is available to a variety of adjacent businesses on Highway 99. The highway has been redesigned to make travel convenient for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit-riders, as well as motorists. To the east, I-5 access, along with the nearby park-and-ride garage and express transit, offer more transportation options.

Residents are involved in ensuring water quality for the lake and nearby streams.

COMMUNITY LIVABILITY GOALS AND POLICIES

Goals

The Community Livability Element is guided by one goal, as follows. This goal is stated at a very broad level to indicate the desired end-result for key topics.

GOAL CL-1. Livability for current and future generations

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Policies

Below are the Comprehensive Plan policies that correspond with each community livability goal. The City of Mountlake Terrace shall implement the following policies.

Policy CL-1.1 Promote a positive image of the city as a vibrant, thriving, and desirable place in which to live, work, shop, and play.

Policy CL-1.2 Strive to achieve the Community Vision identified in this element.

Policy CL-1.3 Provide for the enjoyment of natural resources through the preservation or enhancement of public open space, greenbelts, and trails.

Policy CL-1.4 Promote a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Policy CL-1.5 Encourage community events and activities.

Discussion: A sense of community begins with people seeing each other and having an opportunity for interaction. Activities especially benefit the community when they are held in an open, welcoming manner and help a variety of people to get acquainted, learn about issues, share ideas, appreciate art and music, accomplish a project, or just have fun.

Policy CL-1.6 Create opportunities for public education and participation in community planning.

Policy CL-1.7 Consider social, environmental, and economic factors in community development.

Policy CL-1.8 Encourage the community’s diversity of lifestyles and neighborhoods.

Discussion: Mountlake Terrace represents a broad cross-section of people and neighborhoods. Appreciation of these differences should be encouraged, while maintaining community standards of health and safety.

Policy CL-1.9 Provide quality library services, responding to the needs of the region’s residents.

Policy CL-1.10 Provide recreational programs, parks, and trails that accommodate a variety of interests and abilities.

Policy CL-1.11 Be proactive in identifying and preserving resources of historic or cultural significance.

Policy CL-1.12 Coordinate with other jurisdictions and agencies on matters of public safety and welfare.

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- Policy CL-1.13 Promote a strengthened downtown commercial core and a healthy local economy.
- Policy CL-1.14 Encourage beautification efforts, including but not limited to landscaping and signage, and a clean, well-kept environment.
- Policy CL-1.15 Provide civic buildings, parks, and plazas that encourage friendly neighborhood interaction and meet other citizen needs.
- Policy CL-1.16 Promote high-quality design and development.
- Policy CL-1.17 Support an excellent public school system that provides for students to be served by public schools within Mountlake Terrace.
- Policy CL-1.18 Encourage housing and neighborhoods in which people want to live.
- Policy CL-1.19 Enforce City regulations to control nuisances and meet other requirements.
- Policy CL-1.20 Continue an animal control program.
- Policy CL-1.21 Implement the adopted Sustainability Strategy and monitor sustainability progress.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Measuring performance is an important way to check what is happening. For most elements (or key chapters) in the Comprehensive Plan, a performance measure is given that will be monitored and reported on annually. However, community livability is actually the sum of many measures. Therefore, it will be evaluated by annually monitoring performance measures of the following elements: Environment, Economic Vitality, Land Use, Housing, Capital Facilities, Transportation, and Recreation and Parks.